

The Believer and His Resurrected Lord

JOHN 21

By Prof. Homer A. Kent, Jr.

The present-day Christian is sometimes envious of those believers who lived during the period of the Gospels. Jesus was physically present with them. They could go to Him directly with every problem, and receive a personal interview. How many of us have not at some time wished for a recurrence of those conditions in our own day!

But there is one chapter in John's Gospel which most clearly presents the Lord Jesus in the relation which He bears to all believers today. John 21 is sometimes referred to as the epilogue of the book. It is evident that this last chapter was written as an appendix or addition to his Gospel, coming after the formal conclusion in 20:30-31. The style of the writing, however, is the same as the rest of the book, and evidence that the book was never circulated in the early church without chapter 21 points to the fact that John wrote the epilogue also.

The purpose of this chapter is not to offer proof of the resurrection, for this had been done in chapter 20. If this were the author's aim, the conclusion of 20:30-31 would no doubt have been placed at the end of the added section. Rather, John's purpose was to present the relation which the risen Christ bears to the society of believers. As such, it is of special interest and application to all the church.

The Resurrected Lord: Supplier of Their Needs (vss. 1-14).

The incident of the miraculous catch of fish reveals the resurrected Lord as the supplier of need. When the events of Calvary had taken Jesus from them, we discover a group of needy disciples. Even the resurrection and subsequent appearances did not restore exactly the conditions which the disciples had learned to love.

On this occasion the disciples were discouraged in heart. Seven of the group in Galilee submitted to Peter's suggestion to "go a fishing." This may not indicate a permanent return to the old life, but it did reveal a lack of understanding of Christ's purposes for them. They believed the resurrection but were confused about the future.

They were tired in body. No weariness seems so great as that which follows fruitless toil. "That night they caught nothing."

Moreover, they were dulled in spirit. When Jesus stood on shore in the morning, they "knew not that it was Jesus." How needy are hearts when they fail to recognize the presence of the Master.

But the risen Lord was the answer to their lack. He was sympathetic to their need. His question, "Lads, you don't have anything to eat, do you?" (literal), indicates his knowledge of their fruitless effort.

He brought success to their failure. The direction of Jesus to cast "on the right side of the ship" brought immediate success in place of useless



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toil. The disciples were so impressed with the miraculous catch of fish that they counted every one.

The risen Lord supplied spiritual discernment in place of dullness. The activity of Jesus among the group brought John's recognition, "It is the Lord." Peter, with characteristic aggressiveness, headed straight for the shore. To hearts that are spiritually dull, the risen Christ brings discernment and light.

The truest sympathy in Christian life is found in Christ. The truest success in Christian service is founded upon Him. The only true spirituality for the child of God comes from the One who is the "Light of the world."

In supplying their need, Jesus is shown serving the disciples the bread and the fish. His invitation, "Come and dine," is an invitation to fellowship with Himself. The mere mechanical supply of needs is not sufficient; the human soul craves fellowship with its God and Supplier. The believer is here reminded of the

feast to come when Christ will come and serve the redeemed (Luke 12:37).

The Resurrected Lord: Object of Their Love (vss. 15-17)

This Scripture next reveals that Christ must be the supreme object of the believer's devotion. Every New Testament reader is familiar with the accounts of Peter's denial of his Lord. Since the resurrection Peter had already been privately restored to useful service (Luke 24:34), but on this remarkable occasion there is presented a public reinstatement. Here in unmistakable language is given the greatest motive of Christian service—complete devotion to the risen Lord.

Love for Christ is essential for feeding his lambs, the most helpless of the flock. Love for Christ is essential for shepherding his sheep, those who need all pastoral ministrations. Love for Christ is essential for feeding his sheep, the mature members of the flock who need support and nourishment.

Peter's own words give the interpretation of Jesus' charge to him, when he wrote in later years to congregational leaders: "Feed [shepherd] the flock of God which is among you . . . being ensamples to the flock" (I Pet. 5:2-4). Only a complete love for Christ would be sufficient to carry him and his fellow disciples through the careers which awaited them.

The Resurrected Lord: Director of Their Destiny (vss. 18-25)

In closing his epilogue, John explains and corrects a report which had spread among the churches concerning the future of himself and Peter. In presenting the facts which led to the statement of Jesus, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" he reveals the comforting truth that the destiny of the believer, both ultimately and immediately, is in the control of the resurrected Lord.

The child of God need not fret because he cannot consult Jesus in the flesh. The believer has set forth for him in this portion of the Word the promises, encouragements, and relationship which he bears to the resurrected Christ. Now the responsibility is, "Follow thou me."